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C O N F I D E N T I A L OTTAWA 001284

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [MARR](#) [PREL](#) [PARM](#) [CA](#)

SUBJECT: CANADIAN CABINET DISCUSSES MISSILE DEFENSE

REF: (A) OTTAWA 1123 (B) OTTAWA 492 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Brian Flora,
Reasons 1.5 (b) and (d)

1. (C) The Canadian Cabinet discussed missile defense cooperation with the U.S. in its May 6 meeting, but reached no conclusion and will continue discussions on May 13. Foreign Minister Graham and Defense Minister McCallum briefed Cabinet and encouraged a decision to engage in missile defense negotiations with the U.S. Deputy Prime Minister Manley told the Ambassador after the meeting that a consensus seems to be forming in favor of missile defense negotiations, and that some Cabinet officials whom he expected to be opposed were grudgingly supportive. He also noted that Heritage Minister Sheila Copps, who is publicly opposed to Canadian participation in missile defense, did not attend the meeting.

2. (C) Foreign Affairs sources told us that the lack of a Cabinet decision did not indicate a change in course. Given "differing views" and other topics on the Cabinet agenda, there simply was not enough time to hear from all Cabinet members who wanted to speak on missile defense. They cautioned that there will be intense debate in the days ahead, including at the Liberal MPs' weekly caucus meeting on May 7. But they expected Cabinet to approve a negotiating mandate on May 13, and said that senior Canadian officials (probably Foreign Affairs Assistant Deputy Minister (ADM) Jim Wright and Defense ADM Ken Calder) would want to visit Washington in the following days for preliminary discussions.

3. (C) Up until now, the GoC has carefully avoided taking a position on missile defense. Chretien made his first positive public comments on May 5, telling Commons that "there has been an evolution in this file" with Russia and China toning down their opposition, and saying that the GoC is reconsidering the program. A few Liberal and opposition MPs immediately responded, criticizing missile defense as leading to a new arms race. The chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee recalled that the Committee had recommended against participation as recently as December.

4. (C) Missile defense has also become an issue in the race to succeed Chretien, which will be decided at the Liberal Party leadership convention in November. Last week, leadership frontrunner Paul Martin announced his support for missile defense cooperation with the U.S., which prompted Heritage Minister Copps, another leadership candidate, to reiterate her opposition. Deputy Prime Minister Manley, the third Liberal leadership contender, is known to support Canadian participation in missile defense but has not yet gone public.

5. (C) COMMENT: Graham and McCallum agreed in October that it made sense for Canada to participate in North American missile defense, but this proposed policy shift has been closely held until now (reftels). Martin's endorsement lessens opposition within caucus, as most Liberal MPs want to stay onside with him. There will be much criticism in coming days by opposition MPs and journalists, who charge that the Government's shift is an attempt to curry favor with the U.S. after the fallout over Iraq. But with Chretien apparently on board, we expect to finally get a decision from Cabinet on May 13 to proceed with negotiations.

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